

THE RAPTURE, PART 5

A major area that we want to address is what is known as the Olivet Discourse in [Matthew 24-25](#) and how it actually fits into the topic of the rapture. It is the second longest message that Jesus gave in the New Testament and it is the longest answer that He ever gave to any question that is recorded in the New Testament. The problem that we have to understand is that this portion of Scripture was given to the disciples who thought that Jesus was going to immediately set up His kingdom on the earth. For instance [Luke 19:11](#) says,

Lk 19:11 (NKJV) Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.

Obviously, the disciples, and for many good reasons, did not have a very clear understanding of end-time events, and specifically the Second Coming, so Jesus spoke a parable to them related to a certain nobleman going into a “**far country**” for an undisclosed period of time, and then he was going to return and reward those who had been faithful in his absence. Even in saying this, it certainly does not appear that the disciples actually understood anything about what Jesus was teaching.

So, in terms of understanding the end time events, this passage and [Revelation](#) are without question the two most important passages of prophecy in the Bible dealing with the end times. Other major passages are [Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 9](#), and [Mark 13](#) and [Luke 21](#) which are simply the parallel passages to [Matthew 24-25](#). What Jesus describes in [Matthew 24-25](#) involves unprecedented suffering on a global scale. The time of Tribulation is not just some kind of local holocaust, but events that speak of a time of distress and hardship that will be the most devastating period of suffering ever seen in the world. The disaster of the flood was over in a very short time, but this deluge of suffering and death will be over a seven year period and in a manner never before seen in the world. Once the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments begin, they will be relentless in the pain and suffering that they create. They are God pouring out His wrath on the wicked.

Now, what I want you to understand, and this is very important, is that what is described in [Matthew 24-25](#) is so closely parallel to the awful judgments that are listed in [Revelation 6-19](#) that it is virtually unthinkable that someone could not see the obvious similarity and connection between the two passages. Both passages describe a time of unparalleled affliction and suffering that culminates in the return of Christ to the earth. It is difficult to think that someone who read these passages could not see that they are both referring to the same time and the same events. Listen to how Jesus describes all of these events in [Matthew 24:21](#),

Mt 24:21 (NKJV) For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

This is no small statement. If you are serious about your life and your future, this is not something that you can just casually ignore. When Jesus talks about “**great tribulation**”, He is not kidding or exaggerating. He is not just talking. He is making a divine declaration that cannot be ignored. If it is ignored, it is my assumption that the individual who does ignore this passage is most likely not even saved.

Now, before looking at all of the events that precede the rapture and that follow in the seven years of tribulation, I want to at least look at the prophecy of this time period in [Daniel 9:25-27](#). This is a very important Old Testament prophecy concerning the end times which reads as follows,

Da 9:25 (NKJV) "**Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.**²⁶ **"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.**²⁷ **Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."**

What is described in this passage is the same eschatological time frame described in [Matthew 24-25](#) and [Revelation 6-19](#). A week in this passage is describing a seven year period of time. Here is what Daniel said in this passage. He said that there would be sixty-nine (69) weeks (seven plus sixty two) or 483 years. This is the number of years that would elapse "**from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince**". The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem refers to a decree that Artaxerxes gave in [Nehemiah 2:1-8](#) which reads as follows,

Ne 2:1 (NKJV) **And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.**² **Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."** So I became dreadfully afraid,³ and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.⁵ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."⁶ Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.⁷ Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors *of the region* beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah,⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Historically, this decree occurred 450 years before the birth of Christ, so if you add the thirty three (33) years of his life to 450 years, you come to 483 years, or the sixty-nine (69) prophetic weeks in [Daniel 9](#). Because the day of the Artaxerxes decree is recorded ("**...the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes**"), it was probably the exact day in which Christ would enter Jerusalem on a donkey. That event also occurred in the Jewish month of Nissan on the first day of Passover week. Immediately after this, the Messiah was "**cut off**" by crucifixion just as Daniel had prophesied in [Daniel 9:26](#). So,

the crucifixion marked the ending of Daniel's sixty-nine (69) weeks. That left one last week, or seven years, to make up for the seventy (70) weeks of Daniel's prophecy.

So, the question that has to be resolved is when does this seventieth week actually occur? In Daniel, there is no gap mentioned between week sixty-nine (69) and week seventy (70). However, how we can determine when that seventieth week actually occurs is that [Daniel 9:27](#) says that there is a sign,

Da 9:27 (NKJV) Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

In this seventieth week there is an evil “**prince who is to come**” ([Daniel 9:26](#)). What he does is that he makes a seven year covenant related to Jerusalem, and specifically Israel, but in the middle of that period, or after 3 ½ years, he interrupts that seven year treaty by a blasphemous act of desolation. [Daniel 9:27](#) says it this way – “**and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate**”. [Matthew 24:15](#) says it this way,

Mt 24:15 (NKJV) "Therefore when you see the '*abomination of desolation,*' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

So, [Matthew 24:15](#) is specifically speaking of the same events prophesied by Daniel, or what we call the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation that are divided by this “**abomination of desolation**” after 3 ½ years. [Mark 13:14](#), a parallel passage to [Matthew 24](#), says the same thing,

Mk 13:14 (NKJV) "So when you see the '*abomination of desolation,*' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

This is described a little differently in [Revelation 13:5-6](#), but it is the same event.

Rev 13:5 (NKJV) And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. ⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

I think it is important to fully recognize that there are two distinct halves to this seven year period. The first is called the Tribulation and the second is called the Great Tribulation. In other words, however awful the first 3 ½ years may be, the second 3 ½ years will be much, much worse. In some ways they are very similar, and in other ways they are very different. The first 3 ½ years will be an unbridled indulgence in sin. You have to remember that the church is gone and the Holy Spirit is restraining His influence, so there is nothing to actually stop or impede the devil from unleashing his sexual lusts, perversions, and hatred of God all over the world. There will be no restraints, so sin will be unbridled. No matter how bad we think sin is now, it is nothing in comparison to the onslaught of sin as the Tribulation begins. God will let people do whatever they want with no restraints. The flesh will prevail. It will be a time similar to that of “**Sodom and Gomorrah**”. During this first 3 ½ years there will be the seal and trumpet judgments released on all the world ([Revelation 6-9](#)), so there will be great physical suffering on all who are on the earth,. However, it must be remembered that the level of suffering in the second half, or the Great Tribulation, will be so great that it is impossible to fully describe.

So, the question then is where is the church during these seven (7) years? Please do not forget what I taught you last week that there is a major difference between suffering for righteousness sake or trials or persecution, or a time of great distress versus the actual pouring out of the wrath of God. What we will see later, and this should be extremely encouraging and important to you, is that God is not going to let the church experience the pouring out of His wrath on the wicked. Suffering and persecution are much different than wrath. Persecution is God's way of refining the church, but wrath is God's way of judging the wicked. Those are two very different elements. The actual word for God's "**wrath**" refers specifically to His "anger, indignation, and vengeance". Dr. Zodhiates defines it as "*divine judgment to be inflicted on the wicked*". [2 Thessalonians 1:8](#), speaking of this time of divine judgment and wrath, says,

2Th 1:8 (NKJV) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You need to be incredibly grateful and thankful that your judgment, your punishment, and your deserved wrath was poured out on Christ, so God is not going to make you pay double for your sins. Jesus fully paid for God's wrath on your personal wickedness and rebellion against Him. [John 3:36](#) gives a picture of what awaits the wicked when it says,

Jn 3:36 (NKJV) He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The final events of Revelation are specifically called "**the wrath of the Lamb**" ([Revelation 6:16](#)), and "**the wrath of God**" ([Revelation 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; 19:15](#)). Here is the good news, and I pray that it means everything to you. The death of Christ removes the wrath of God from being poured out and abiding on you if you are a believer. If you are not a believer, you better enjoy this life as much as possible, because what awaits you if you do not come to Christ will not be what you were expecting. This is not a time for weak preachers to preach weak messages in a weak church to weak Christians. The time is short, and if someone you know and love takes these events lightly, in all likelihood they simply may not be saved. I keep saying that over and over, so I hope you are paying attention.

In reality, the finalization of the end-time events occurs in three distinct stages – (1) Jesus coming for His church in the air in the rapture, (2) the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week), and (3) Jesus coming with His saints to the earth in His Second Coming. What we know is that during the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation that Israel and not the church is the focus of what God is doing on the earth. [Romans 11:26](#) says,

Ro 11:26 (NKJV) And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

If you miss this one simple point, then you will mishandle everything related to Eschatology and the end-times. The entire seven years of Tribulation are a prelude to the national redemption of Israel – not the church. [Romans 9-11](#) describe God's dealing with Israel and why He is going to save them.

Returning to the Olivet Discourse back in [Matthew 24-25](#), the disciples asked Jesus three specific questions to begin the passage, but the key question that they asked Him was the last question in [Matthew 24:3](#) when they asked the following,

Mt 24:3 (NKJV) Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, (1) when will these things be? (2) And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and (3) of the end of the age?"

This phrase “**the end of the age**” was previously mentioned by Jesus in [Matthew 13:39-40](#) in the parable of the wheat and tares and in [Matthew 13:49](#) in the parable of the dragnet and the good fish and the bad fish.

Mt 13:39 (NKJV) The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.

Mt 13:49 (NKJV) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just,

In both of these passages, Jesus is speaking about the final judgment of all of the wicked who have hated God and rejected Christ. It will certainly include all of those persons who were outwardly religious, but never truly saved and converted. Unfortunately, there are many, many people who fall into this category, and the majority of them are in churches just like this one.

One of the points of contention relative to this passage is that in this discourse Jesus seemed to completely ignore the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. The reason for that is because the destruction of Jerusalem was not at all germane to the “**end of the age**”. What happened in 70AD has absolutely nothing to do with end-time events that may very well happen in the 21st century, maybe in our lifetime. The point is that the rapture of the church is “imminent”. I.e., there are no prophetic events that have to be fulfilled before it can happen. It could happen today, so the message to everyone, believers included, is to be prepared. Playing around with God and taking salvation lightly is like playing Russian roulette with a fully loaded gun. You cannot win. I have expressed to you previously and will continue to do so that based on [2 Thessalonians 2](#), it does not appear that people who have a meaningful knowledge of Jesus Christ, and certainly enough to be saved, but who have refused to actually yield their life to Christ by a sincere and genuine faith, will have any chance of salvation after the rapture. I hope that I am completely wrong about that reality, and I know that God is immensely long-suffering and patient with everyone. However, what the rapture does is mark the beginning of God’s wrath being poured on the wicked and on those who have willingly and knowingly refused to submit their life to Christ.

If anyone thinks that life in the next 30-40 years will be anything like it was 30-40 years before today, they are like an ostrich with its head in the sand. They are both naïve and spiritually delusional. We are living in a time of great mercy and grace, but there is a good chance that that time is about to abruptly end. Hopefully, I will convince you of the acceleration and the depravity of sin in the world occurring at an unprecedented rate before we reach the end of this study. If that does not motivate you, then I cannot help you. My prayer is that it will serve as a challenge for you to make sure that every area of your personal life, every area of your married life, and every area of your spiritual life are in order and are pleasing to God. As far as I am concerned as your pastor, none of us have any legitimate excuses that can exempt us from not fully committing our life to Jesus Christ. If you find yourself in that category, I sincerely exhort you to reconsider the sincerity of your relationship with Jesus Christ. May God help us all.